



WISEWOMAN

Success Story 12 Conferences Unite Communities to Raise Women's Awareness of Smoking Risks

Location Scottsbluff, Nebraska

Focus Develop community resources throughout Nebraska that will help women quit smoking.

Strategy The WISEWOMAN program collaborated with Tobacco Free Nebraska and the Comprehensive Cancer Control Program to host a series of conferences to increase community awareness of tobacco-related health risks and engage community agencies in addressing smoking cessation. The first conference was held in Scottsbluff.

Early Successes The conference mobilized the Scottsbluff community to create an advocacy network committed to preventing tobacco-related cancer. The event also provided a valuable networking opportunity for both individuals and organizations and inspired community members to develop a public education campaign to highlight the health risks associated with tobacco use.

Seventy people attended the first Scottsbluff conference, and the community plans to host a second conference in 2005 in order to continue efforts to address health risks related to smoking and develop resources to help people quit. Two other conferences were held in 2004: one in Kearney and one in Columbus.

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Conferences Unite Communities to Raise Women's Awareness of Smoking Risks

After funding for the state's QuitLine ran out at the end of June 2004, the Nebraska WISEWOMAN staff knew they needed a new way to promote cancer and tobacco awareness. They needed to develop cessation services for their participants who smoked. They turned to public health organizations and local communities for help in developing resources to help women become advocates for tobacco control. The WISEWOMAN program partners with more than 600 private clinics in Nebraska.

The WISEWOMAN program teamed up with Tobacco Free Nebraska and the Comprehensive Cancer Control Program to pilot Women, Tobacco & Cancer conferences in three rural Nebraska locations. The goals were to increase community awareness about the cancer risks associated with tobacco use and secondhand smoke and to engage community agencies in efforts to help women quit smoking. Tobacco Free Nebraska provided funding for the conferences and coordinated all activities. Together the organizations publicized and recruited attendees.

WISEWOMAN staff helped choose the conference locations. "We were looking for sites with strong WISEWOMAN clinics, a large number of WISEWOMAN participants, and strong Tobacco Prevention and Comprehensive Cancer Control Board coalitions," WISEWOMAN Director Melissa Leypoldt says. Scottsbluff was an ideal first choice because of its well-respected cancer hospital, Regional West Medical Center. Plus the Tobacco Prevention Coalition is active in the community, and a large number of WISEWOMAN participants live in Scottsbluff and nearby Gering and Terrytown. Most importantly, the community wanted to host the conference.

The conference was planned for April 2004. In mid-January, Tobacco Free Nebraska began seeking support from programs such as the Tobacco Prevention and Control Coalition; the Health Department; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); the Minority Health Coalition; the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension; and the Regional West Medical Center Cancer Program. WISEWOMAN helped develop a conference agenda that would attract both community organizations and individual women living in and around Scottsbluff. They planned for speakers to make educational presentations in the morning, whereas the afternoon would be devoted to brainstorming sessions. This format would allow participants to discuss ways to reduce tobacco use and advocate for cancer prevention. Dr. Tom White, a lung cancer surgeon at the medical center, agreed to make a presentation, and Joyce Urbon, a cancer survivor and comedian, signed on to be the keynote speaker.

It was not difficult to let community organizations know about the conference, but getting the word out to women liv-

ing in and around Scottsbluff was a challenge. Tobacco Free Nebraska purchased an ad in the local newspaper and asked all the partners to pass out flyers that advertised the event. Conference planners agreed the event would be successful if at least 20 to 30 local people attended. They were thrilled to welcome 70 people from Scottsbluff and the surrounding area to the event. Thanks to the support of the hospital and the partners, the cost of hosting the conference totaled less than \$1,000.

Importance of Success

The conference provided a valuable networking opportunity for both organizations and individuals. Staff from agencies that had never before worked together learned about each

other's programs. People working with programs designed to reach minorities met some of the women they hope to serve and gained a greater understanding of the need for disease prevention. As a result of the brainstorming session, the conference participants agreed to work with public schools to increase education about the link between tobacco and cancer. They also decided to work together to develop and deliver a common message about the health risks associated with tobacco use to the community.

"There is no greater method of getting the prevention message out to people than having community members talking to each other."

—Tom White, MD
Lung Cancer Surgeon
Regional West Medical Center

"Bringing all the folks together from the community, not just the medical agencies, has created a great basis for establishing a network of advocates for this community," Dr. White says. "There is no greater method of getting the prevention message out to people than having community members talking to each other."

Members of the Scottsbluff community plan to host a second conference in 2005. Until then, they will continue building networks and planning advocacy activities related to cancer, smoking, and secondhand tobacco smoke. They expect to have as many as 150 people working on this advocacy project in the future. Two other conferences were held in 2004: one in Kearney, in Southcentral Nebraska, and one in Columbus, in Northeast Nebraska.

Lessons Learned

- Build partnerships when planning labor-intensive events. The collaboration helps divide the workload and increases the likelihood of success.
- Persuade partners to commit to a project early in the planning process. While contacting people by phone or e-mail may be more efficient, having at least one face-to-face meeting with the partners can encourage them to buy into the project more readily.